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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 YEREVAN 000141

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SUBJECT: ARMENIA: VISIT OF E.U. TROIKA

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Classified By: Classified By: CDA Joseph Pennington, reasons 1.4 (b,d).

¶1. (SBU) SUMMARY: An EU Troika delegation met with senior GOAM officials as part of a 3-day visit to the South Caucasus February 4-6. The delegation discussed, among other things, issues related to Armenia's upcoming presidential elections, Nagorno-Karabakh conflict settlement, as well as other aspects of the Neighborhood policy (ENP). The EU Troika presided over the inauguration of the new European Commission diplomatic mission in Armenia. We obtained a readout from the French and European Commission chiefs of mission. END SUMMARY.

¶2. (U) An EU "Troika" delegation consisting of Slovenian Foreign Minister Dimitrij Rupel, European Commissioner for External Relations and European Neighborhood Policy (ENP) Benita Ferrero-Waldner, and the EU Special Representative for the Southern Caucasus Peter Semneby, met with a number of senior Armenian government (GOAM) officials during February 4-6. They included President Kocharian, Prime Minister Serge Sargsian, and National Assembly Speaker Tigran Torosian. The Troika reviewed Armenia's compliance with its stated commitments to the ENP, the country's business climate, respect for human rights and a free and independent mass media, as well as the upcoming presidential elections. The EU delegation also reiterated the importance of continuing efforts aimed at a peaceful settlement of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict.

PRIME MINISTER SARGSIAN

¶3. (C) During their meeting with PM Sargsian, the Troika expressed hope that the upcoming presidential elections would mark an improvement over the May 2007 parliamentary elections and would indeed be "competitive, free, and fair." The Troika offered constructive criticism on GOAM democratic reforms and encouraged the GOAM to improve independent media access to the elections, citing Gala TV as an example. In addition, Ferrero-Waldner pointed out that the GOAM needed to demonstrate greater respect for human rights in order to comply with all chapters of the ENPP action plan.

¶4. (C) All GOAM interlocutors affirmed Armenia's determination to hold free and fair elections, but PM Sargsian did so with particular fervor, pointing out that this will bear directly on his own legitimacy if he wins the presidency. Sargsian also brought up a number of priorities for GOAM vis-a-vis the EU. These were: 1) Visa facilitation, with a goal of eventual visa-free travel to the EU. In the meantime, the PM suggested a joint Schengen consulate be established in Yerevan that could issue visas for those EU

countries that did not have an embassy in Yerevan. The establishment of a regional European cultural center in Yerevan modeled on other centers in Baku and Tbilisi. 3) The harmonization of bilateral trade regulations with a view to an eventual regional free trade agreement.

PRESIDENT KOCHARIAN

15. (C) In their meeting with President Kocharian, the Troika stressed the importance of continuing negotiations for the settlement of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. While Kocharian was somewhat skeptical of the potential for progress, he indicated that Minsk Group negotiations would continue uninterrupted by the Presidential elections.

FOREIGN MINISTER OSKANIAN

16. (C) The Troika also discussed Turkey-Armenia relations during their meeting with Foreign Minister Oskanian and were pleased to note that he appeared "reinvigorated" on the subject. Oskanian stated that the GOAM was ready to officially recognize its border with Turkey, downplay "genocide" recognition, and participate in a joint historical commission to study the "genocide" issue, in exchange for Turkey's opening the border and establishing normal diplomatic relations. Ambassador Smessow noted that PM Sargsian was in agreement with Oskanian on these points.

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17. (U) The featured event of the Troika visit was the inauguration of the newly-completed, purpose-built facility to house the newly upgraded European Commission (EC) delegation. This coincides with the upgrading of the local EC presence to formal "delegation" status, headed by an ambassadorial-rank chief of mission. Previously, the local EC personnel had been a branch office of a South Caucasus delegation, headed by an ambassador in Tbilisi. The Italian (of Germanic descent) charge d'affaires, Raul de Lutzenberger, has been promoted to the new ambassadorial position, but has not yet presented his credentials. The Troika noted that the commissioning of a new building for the mission was evidence of the European Commission's longer-term commitment to Armenia.
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